January 6, 2010

Washington, DC – Rep. Ben Ray Luján has sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, urging the Department to consider expanding the use of MagViz technology at airports throughout the United States. The letter notes that the technology could be particularly timely given the recent Christmas day terror plot.

“As we work to address the vulnerabilities this plot has exposed, we must institute systems and technologies that would prevent the specific security breaches on Flight 253 while having the vision and flexibility to deter future threats,” said Rep. Luján. “An overarching objective of these applications is to get the traveling public through security in a rapid manner.”

Rep. Luján has advocated for expanded use of MagViz in the past. On February 25, 2009, Rep. Luján encouraged Secretary Napolitano to consider broader use of MagViz technology when she testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security.

MagViz—a new technology that has been developed by the scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory—is a scanning machine that adapts Magnetic Resonance Imaging techniques to identify concealed liquids. As items are screened through MagViz, the machine is able to identify dangerous or suspicious liquids based upon their unique chemical fingerprints.

FULL TEXT OF LETTER BELOW

January 5, 2010

Hon. Janet Napolitano
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

The failed Christmas Day attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 in Detroit demonstrates the need for constant vigilance in confronting the evolving nature of the threats to air travel security. As we work to address the vulnerabilities this plot has exposed, we must institute systems and technologies that would prevent the specific security breaches on Flight 253 while having the vision and flexibility to deter future threats. An overarching objective of these applications is to get the traveling public through security in a rapid manner.

On February 25, 2009, when you appeared before the House Homeland Security Committee, you may recall that I mentioned the MagViz system to you. MagViz—a new technology that has been developed by the scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory—is a scanning machine that adapts Magnetic Resonance Imaging techniques to identify concealed liquids. As items are screened through MagViz, the machine is able to identify dangerous or suspicious liquids based upon their unique chemical fingerprints. Additionally, as new substances and threats are uncovered, the devices can be updated to detect them. This technology, which has undergone a trial run at the Albuquerque Sunport, could be ready for implementation at additional airports in the near term once a commercialization partner has been identified.

The technology of the MagViz system represents a clear improvement over our current magnetometer-dependant security scans that can detect only a very limited number of metal objects. As we reform our airport security procedures, it is imperative that we implement new technologies that are capable of detecting new threats and deterring future attacks. I urge you to invest in additional research and consider fast-tracking the implementation of the MagViz program.

Respectfully submitted,

Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress